

Bumps on the Learning Curve

By Frank Frost

This story and the next are taken from a series of stories by Frank Frost about his adventures while in the Navy during the war and just after leaving service.

It was winter, February, I think. The year was 1945 and at long last my ship, the USS *Gosper*, was ready to sail. She was no sleek ship of the line but rather, a slow, homely, comfortable workhorse. She had been built in the Kaiser shipyards in Portland, Oregon only three or four months previously and then converted from a cargo vessel into a troop transport. Now she was provisioned and ready for sea. We had fifteen hundred army troops on board and were scheduled to sail in the morning. The rumor racing through the crew was that our destination was to be Guadalcanal.

As an eighteen year-old seaman first class, the overriding thing on my mind, though, was not saving the world for democracy. It was LIBERTY. I had one last night ashore before heaven-knew-what. One last night to paint the streets of San Francisco a shade of red the city would not soon forget. Polished, pressed, and combed, I was in line for the first liberty call late that afternoon.

When I turned the corner from the Embarcadero onto Market Street with all of San Francisco glistening before me, I had no particular objective--other than revelry. It was far too early for any of the big night spots such as Bimbo's 365 Club, the Top of the Mark, or the International Settlement, to be open. But, as

I swaggered up Market Street in my best imitation of an old sea dog's rolling gait, I passed a seemingly endless lineup of bars. I figured, "What the hell, I might as well get started."

I wheeled into a likely looking den of iniquity, found a stool and ordered a boilermaker. The bartender took in my obviously youthful face, then my uniform. Finally he shrugged and set the shot glass of whiskey with its beer chaser in front of me. I downed it and ordered another, then another, and perhaps two or three more before I noticed the bar seemed to be having difficulty staying horizontal. The lights were behaving erratically as well. For that matter so was my stomach.

I eased off my bar stool and lurched my way back to the men's room. I emptied my stomach violently and none too daintily into the toilet. I didn't feel well at all. Perhaps if I sat on the floor for a few minutes...

I opened my eyes painfully. I was lying flat on the floor amid a litter of paper towels and other detritus I preferred not to identify. There were a couple of guys, sailors I think, going through my wallet.

"Whaddya think you're doin'?" I demanded, with all the phony belligerence I could muster. They assured me they were just checking my I.D. to see what ship I was from in case I needed help. With touching concern they helped me to my feet and brushed me off a bit, then advised me that it might be prudent if I stayed in the head until I was sure of

my navigational skills (and the stability of my stomach). I thanked them and took their advice while they went on their way.

After fifteen minutes or so, my addled brain began to wonder just how good these Samaritans of mine actually were. I checked the contents of my wallet. Surprise, surprise, it was empty. I muttered a few of the saltier phrases I had learned during my brief naval career, retched another time or two and wove my way to the street, struggling desperately to keep nausea at bay.

Fortunately, I had developed the practice of keeping two or three dollars

tucked away in my inside jumper pocket for use in unforeseen emergencies. My two "friends" had not discovered that little cache. I hailed a cab and had the driver deliver me to my ship. I stumbled aboard, sick, disheveled and reeking. I groped my way to the haven of my bunk and collapsed.

I had celebrated my last liberty by going ashore, getting drunk, passing out, getting rolled, and somehow making it back to my ship safe and semi-sound. The entire adventure had taken perhaps three hours. Outside, it was still daylight. ♦

Mary Morrison and the green chain gang

Bradwood

By Frank Frost

With the end of the school year, the U.S. Navy's V-12 program was discontinued and I had the option of shifting to the peacetime N.R.O.T.C. program, if I intended to stay at Oregon State College (I didn't), or being discharged. I chose the latter. The Navy had treated me well. I had no complaints but it didn't figure into my plans for the future.

Discharge from the Navy

I was discharged on June 25, 1946, two months and one day after my twentieth birthday. Two months after that, on August 24th, M.H. (Mary Helen Morrison) and I were married. Those two months between June and August were busy ones. In September, I (we) intended to move to Eugene so I could enter the University of Oregon to major in architecture. I retained my fascination with how things went together and liked the more creative sound of an architect's career as compared with that of an engi-

neer. And not coincidentally, my deficient background in math wouldn't be such a handicap.

But first things first. I had my mustering-out pay, I think it was \$300, and I had the promise of the G.I. Bill to help me through college. I was also getting married. We needed to set up house-keeping. For the first time in my life, I had to start thinking about such things as paying rent and buying groceries. I needed to buy civilian clothes. I needed finances for at least a minimal honeymoon. I needed a job.

Easier said than done. With the thousands of returning veterans suddenly in the job market, along with a dramatic reduction in job opportunities now that the need for war production was over, the possibilities were limited. I hung around Portland for a couple of weeks, ostensibly job hunting, but mostly to be near M.H., before giving up. I went



Courtesy of Frank Frost

Frank Frost and Mary Morrison early in 1946.

down the river to the little sawmill town of Bradwood, off of Highway 30, some twenty-five or so miles from Astoria. This was only a half-dozen miles from Brownsmead where I had grown up so I was in familiar territory once again. My mother (Ellen Frost, later Ellen Quist)

had moved to Bradwood while I was in the Navy, to take a job in the cookhouse. She was renting a little two bedroom house, so by nudging my younger sister, Katherine, aside, I had a place to stay.

Small mill town

Bradwood was a small company town, fairly typical of its time. The sawmill was the sole employer and its sole reason for being. The town and the mill were situated on a flat, low-lying plain bordering on the Columbia and hemmed in by steep, tree covered hills in every other direction. It had a single street edged with wooden sidewalks and two rows of nearly identical little company houses. Incidentally, all the walks in town

were elevated a foot or so above the ground. The earth got a trifle squishy once the winter rains began in earnest.

At the end of the street stood a house that looked as though it had been built to house the superintendent or some such reigning dignitary. I have no mem-

ory as to who actually lived there. The superintendent at the time, Mr. Chamberlain, lived down on the main street along with everyone else. The house was a landmark though, since it sat well up on the hill at the end of town, the only building that was not located on the soggy river bottom flatland. It was also the only house in town that boasted a coat of paint.

Behind the workers' houses on one side of the street was the railroad, the mill, and the river. Behind the houses on the other side were a number of bunkhouses and a bath house for unmarried mill hands. As in all such company towns, the number of bunkhouse residents created the need for a dining room, or "cookhouse" as it was always called. It was the biggest building in town other than the mill buildings themselves. It sat smack in the center of everything, directly across from the entrance to the mill yard, where it was handy to everyone. Next to the cookhouse was a community hall where gatherings of various sorts took place. It served as the union hall but I assume it, or at least the land beneath it, was actually owned by the company.

The only other building of size was a small general store. It was company owned, of course, like everything else in Bradwood, but I think it was run as a concession so it may not have been a true "company store" in the traditional sense.

Directly across the street from my mother's house was a small building that had originally been built to serve as a one room school. When I lived there, it served to house Bradwood's little library. The creation of the library had been a project spearheaded by my mother and was her pride and joy. It, complemented by periodic visits from the county bookmobile, proved to be a very successful adjunct to the little town.

With all the elements of Bradwood interconnected by raised wooden walkways and with winter nights being long and dark, a system of streetlights was a practical necessity. The system lit the town very nicely but it was all controlled by a single master switch. Everyone, or at least all the kids, knew the location of the switch. The occasional blackout, resulting from the application of this knowledge, may have irritated some of the adults but the kids found it a great enhancement to late evening games of hide and seek.

So that was Bradwood: scruffy and dingy, entering its last decade as an operating mill town -- and looking it.

Everyone knew my mother, of course. She was the baker and assistant cook, and she was reliable, so the superintendent figured he might as well give her kid a job too. Consequently, I was hired and put to work on the "green chain."

The "green chain" was actually a wide conveyor belt carrying rough-sawn, green lumber from the mill. On the green chain the rough lumber was first graded, then pulled off manually and stacked according to size, length and grade so it could be picked up and moved on to the next steps on its way toward becoming finished lumber ready to be shipped out via truck, rail or steamship. (Bradwood had its own dock for ocean-going vessels.) "Pulling green chain," as it was called, was hard, rather mindless work, but I actually didn't mind it. Hard work felt good after nine months as a student and the repetitive nature of the job gave me plenty of time to dream about the future.

The mill was old and it did break down from time to time but the millwrights and mechanics always got it up and running again. Even in 1946, it had the flavor of a bygone era. The operation

was incredibly wasteful by today's standards but in those days it was still the norm. Of course, it had a "wigwam burner," a massive tepee-shaped incinerator that was kept burning day and night, year around. That is where sawdust and scrap wood went to be disposed of (all the stuff that is turned into particle board and other such products today). The burner was made of sheet metal except for the very top which was a heavy screen, designed to provide draft, yet stop flying sparks. Downwind of the burner was always a shadowy pall of smoke and flying ash.

Just about everything in town was made of wood. The houses, all the sidewalks, the mill buildings, the dock -- everything. The houses were heated with wood stoves and cooking was done on wood-fired ranges. Every house had a sizable woodshed attached to it which could be entered directly from the house without stepping out into the winter rain. The Bradwood air was always pungent with the resinous perfume of fresh-cut fir and wood smoke.

Mill workers

The men (and a few women) who worked the mill tended to be a rough and ready lot. Most of the married men, those who rented and raised their families in the little company houses, were fairly stable but the bunkhouse denizens were seldom so well domesticated. They worked hard, but the five o'clock whistle, especially on Friday, meant a quick shower, maybe a clean shirt and a sprint out of Bradwood to the nearest tavern. Pale, drawn faces and shaky hands routinely marked many of my fellow green chain workers on Monday mornings. Mostly I liked these guys. I had grown up among loggers and fishermen, rough and ready men of a similar ilk.

I had grown up among them and

understood and liked them. Not so M.H. One weekend the previous winter, shortly after we had become engaged, I was able to borrow my dad's car and the two of us drove to Bradwood so she could experience me in my native habitat. It was to be her first meeting with my mother, her first visit to Bradwood, and her first chance to meet any of my relatives. Naturally, she wanted to make a good impression. She dressed for the occasion in her fuchsia trimmed gray suit, high heels, her one pair of precious, nearly unobtainable nylons, a perky little hat -- and her fur coat. She looked beautiful and every inch of what she was, a pretty young banker's daughter from Portland's West Hills. I suspect that, once we arrived, I realized for the first time what a dingy little place Bradwood was. She didn't seem to notice.

M.H. and my mother hit it off immediately. How could it be otherwise, these two very special women in my life? They *had* to like each other. How lucky I was that my confidence was validated.

While I was slaving on the green chain that summer, she came for a second visit, this time by train. The next day, the two of us set off for Brownsmead to drop in on various friends and relatives again. This time I didn't have a convenient car to borrow, but having grown up out here in the wilds, I was used to hitching rides. M.H. wasn't but she was game. She wasn't expecting that the first ride offered would be on a motorcycle though. She was still game. So the two of us climbed on the back of a big Harley-Davidson, and with a mighty spray of gravel, we were off to go calling...◇

See also Frank Frost's story, "On Into The Night" in the Spring 1998 issue of Cumtux.

Japanese Residents of the County

The number of Japanese in Clatsop County has never been more than a small fraction of that of their old-world neighbors, the Chinese. Trading connections with the Chinese had been established early and proved profitable for many Western ship-owners while the Japanese resisted such overtures. Not only tea and silk brought wealth to the shippers, but also cargoes of Chinese laborers. As a result, the Chinese population grew rapidly on the west coast of America. (Ranald McDonald, an Astorian who was fascinated with all things Japanese, stranded himself on the shores of Japan in 1848, eventually helping to open their doors to trade.)

In 1901, some fifty Japanese were brought to Clatsop County to work for the Columbia River Packers Association under Chinese bosses, who gave them the most unskilled work in the cannery.

More Japanese were brought in to Clatsop County that same year to work on road building projects and on the railroad. Unions, representing white workers, sought to have them fired, fearing, as did the Chinese, that the Japanese would replace them in the labor market. Most left. Some remained, however, setting up restaurants and curio shops in town and vegetable gardens in the country.

On December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the U.S. declared war on Japan. That night, Astoria had its first "black out." The West Coast suddenly seemed a likely target for Japanese bombs. Immediately, the F.B.I. rounded up 736 Japanese nationals in the U.S. and Hawaii who were now considered dangerous. A statement was issued, at the time, by Attorney General Francis Biddle, that he believed that many persons of Japanese extraction were loyal and should not be subject to seizure.

It was estimated then that there were 60,000 Japanese on the West Coast, of whom half were "nisei," American-born or naturalized citizens. In Clatsop County, there were only 37 Japanese aliens: 1 in Seaside, 11 in Hammond, and the rest in Astoria. These numbers did not include the *nisei*. The law at the time gave American citizenship to children of Japanese ancestry who were born in the U.S., but did not allow foreign-born Japanese to become citizens. Citizens, or not, all were now watched with suspicion. Police raids were made on their homes.

There were protests among the local Japanese at this. A few had been here for forty years. Henry Nomachi, a well-known resident and a former ju-jitsu wrestler, reminded the reporter for the *Astorian Budget* that, in 1922, after fire destroyed most of Astoria's downtown, the local Japanese people, in spite of their poverty, collected \$1,132 for Astoria's emergency fund. Nomachi had donated the proceeds from several of his wrestling matches, too.

On Dec. 13, 1941, it was announced that the funds of local Japanese aliens were frozen. Those who wanted money from their bank accounts to live on had to apply to the federal reserve for a form to be filled out and sent in.

On January 26, 1942, all enemy aliens, Germans, Italians as well as Japanese, were ordered to apply for identification papers to carry on their person at all times. Hans Bue, assistant postmaster, reported that sixty-eight aliens living in Clatsop County had been registered.

Two weeks later two Japanese aliens were arrested at their homes in Fort Stevens and Tongue Point for having contraband.

On February 24th, the *Budget* reported that the Clatsop Post of the Amer-